



Achieving the Dream

Community Colleges Count

# ACHIEVING SUCCESS

THE STATE POLICY NEWSLETTER OF ACHIEVING THE DREAM: COMMUNITY COLLEGES COUNT

WINTER 2010

## CONTENTS

- 2. Q&A: Assessing the Impact of *Achieving the Dream*
- 8. Levers for Change: The Developmental Education Initiative State Policy Framework
- 9. Featured Resource: National Conference Of State Legislatures
- 10. Resources on Community College Student Success

This newsletter is published by Jobs for the Future for *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count*, a national initiative to help more community college students succeed (earn degrees, earn certificates, or transfer to other institutions to continue their studies). The initiative is particularly concerned about student groups that have faced the most significant barriers to success, including low-income students and students of color. See [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org) for more on the initiative and [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org) for more on Jobs for the Future.



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## In this Issue

Welcome to the winter 2010 issue of *Achieving Success*, the quarterly state policy newsletter of *Achieving the Dream*. In this issue, you'll find:

- An interview with Marc Herzog, Chancellor of the Connecticut Community College System, and Monty Sullivan, who until recently served as Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Research for the Virginia Community College System. Virginia, one of the first states to join *Achieving the Dream*, concluded its formal participation in the initiative this year, and Connecticut's commitment will conclude later in 2010. We asked these two leaders to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of *Achieving the Dream*, what their states have accomplished with its help, lessons they have learned from their participation, and how states can continue to leverage the progress they have made.
- The first installment of a new regular feature in this newsletter: the Developmental Education Initiative page. Launched in summer 2009, the DEI includes an ambitious three-year effort by six early-round *Achieving the Dream* states to use policy levers to dramatically improve student success in developmental education. This issue introduces the policy framework that will guide states' activities.
- A profile of the National Conference of State Legislatures' recent article profiling the growing importance of community colleges and initiatives like *Achieving the Dream*.
- Links to useful resources on community college success and state higher education policy.

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If you have questions about the newsletter, its content, or subscribing, please contact Jeff Wetherhold: [jwetherhold@jff.org](mailto:jwetherhold@jff.org).



Monty Sullivan



Susan Wood



Marc Herzog

**Q&A: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF *ACHIEVING THE DREAM***

*As 2010 begins, the Achieving the Dream initiative is at a crossroads. The seven states that joined the initiative in 2004 and 2005 have concluded their commitments or are preparing to do so later this year. They now have an opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of Achieving the Dream, what their states have accomplished with its help, and lessons they have learned from their participation. This time of transition also presents an opportunity to discuss how states can continue to leverage the work of Achieving the Dream moving forward. We asked prominent community college leaders from two early-round Achieving the Dream states to share their thoughts on incorporating the initiative into their strategic planning processes, creating an environment that makes student success the focus of state policy deliberations, and building support for a student success policy agenda.*

*Monty Sullivan served as Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Research for the Virginia Community College System until August 2009. He played a leading role in Virginia's involvement in Achieving the Dream and helped institute reforms that made student success a key part of the system's focus and strategic planning. He has returned to his home state, where he is now Executive Vice President for the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.*

*Susan Wood, who has succeeded Monty in the position of Vice Chancellor and was a close colleague during his time there, joined him for this interview. She offers her perspective on recent developments in Virginia and the role that Achieving the Dream will continue to play in the state.*

*Marc Herzog has been the Chancellor of the Connecticut Community College System since 2000 and has served in a leadership capacity there for more than 25 years. He oversees a system of 12 community colleges that serves more than 55,000 credit students and over 40,000 non-credit students. Chancellor Herzog has been a leading advocate for putting student success at the center of Connecticut's postsecondary agenda.*

*Prior to joining the system office, he was Director of Financial Aid at Tunxis Community College in Connecticut. He has also held many leadership positions in the state association of financial aid administrators, served as Dean of Students at Tunxis, and been a community college instructor.*

**What has been the most important aspect of *Achieving the Dream* in supporting a student success policy agenda in your state?**

**Monty Sullivan:** The most important part of the student success policy discussion was informing the conversation at the state level. Although I know we had some folks on the state team who knew a little bit about this business, we needed to understand the national dialogue.

The state policy meetings helped us translate the national discussion into our own state plan. We were then able to take it to the institutional level and connect the broader policy picture with what is practical. *Achieving the Dream* helped us connect with what was going on nationally and capitalize on it.

**Susan Wood:** I would use the word catalyst, launching pad, or springboard to describe *Achieving the Dream*. It opened the door for us to launch a number of initiatives. It gave us an inroad and a reason to go much broader and deeper.

**Marc Herzog:** From Connecticut's perspective, I think the most important aspect of *Achieving the Dream* has been advocacy for a student success policy agenda. We understood that we needed to be focused on student success, and we were looking for a way to implement that. *Achieving the Dream* gave us the framework for advocacy.

What has resulted here is the adoption of a basic strategic priority that addresses the student success agenda at the highest level possible—the Board of Trustees. That would not have happened without an advocacy role, which would not have happened without *Achieving the Dream*. It has allowed us to define student success and to address the implications of that definition.

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-Monty Sullivan

**Both Connecticut and Virginia took the student success conversation beyond the small pool of institutions that officially participated in *Achieving the Dream* in each state. How did you reach out to community colleges not participating in the initiative, and why was this important?**

**Sullivan:** The two states represented here have centralized systems with structures that allow us to drill down to the college level, which you have a more difficult time accomplishing in a decentralized state. I think governance is key.

We were able to drive the student success agenda through Virginia’s Vice Presidents for Academic and Student Affairs Council (ASAC). I think our vice presidents were a bit disengaged in system-level policy discussions when Virginia started this initiative in 2004. The discussion among the leadership seemed to be more about budgets and buildings, and I think you could apply that to nearly any state. It was all about resources and not about results—student success. By empowering that group to have an agenda and putting its members in touch with the national discussion, we created a group of advocates who are out there on a mission to improve student success.

In every single ASAC meeting, which includes about 60 vice presidents, the entire discussion is about student success. The system office has not driven this effort; the group has. At the point where they began to take ownership, it took on a life of its own. It was actually a lot of fun to watch and be a part of. We viewed our role at the system office as setting up the conversation. Everyone in that room wants to see student success improve. It is not a matter of the will to make it happen; it is a matter of how.

When you set the stage for that kind of conversation among a group of talented professionals focused on the right outcomes, it happens. It may take time—it probably took eighteen months to two years before we began to see signs of the group grabbing hold of the *Achieving the Dream* agenda at a state level and moving forward. But when it happened, it was not just about six *Achieving the Dream* institutions. It was about a larger group of vice presidents who all agreed that there

was something unique about how we were talking about policy change and its impact on student success.

It helped that those vice presidents knew about *Achieving the Dream*. They heard about it through the participating colleges, so to them it was positive and they wanted to be a part of it. They embraced it as part of ASAC’s work, and that group was the conduit through which we reached the college level.

As a result of these efforts, the Virginia Community College System now has a number of significant student success initiatives that are clear evidence of a system-wide focus on student success. At a broad system level, the goals in the new strategic plan directly reflect *Achieving the Dream*. At a detailed level, a statewide developmental education task force recently had its recommendations approved unanimously by ASAC and the Council of Presidents. These recommendations included substantial changes in policy to improve student success in developmental education.

**Herzog:** I agree that governance structure is really important, and we are clearly at an advantage because of it. It is much easier to have a system conversation about a strategic initiative in this environment.

I sit on the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges, and I remember hearing about this new initiative called *Achieving the Dream* before it started and once the first round of states were selected. There was a lot of discussion about *Achieving the Dream*, and there was a tendency among those not involved to sound almost resentful. In particular, there were discussions among the first five *Achieving the Dream* states about sharing data publicly, and those states not involved in the initiative did not want other states to speak for them. A big reason we got involved in the Cross-State Data Work Group a couple of years later was that I felt we needed to be involved in order to be compared fairly.

As a result of those early conversations, I was very sensitive about how to bring the initiative to colleges that were not officially part of *Achieving the Dream*. When Connecticut was selected to participate,

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our conversation at the system level was about how to use the state policy work to accomplish that. In particular, we committed from day one that the data portion of *Achieving the Dream* would be applied to all 12 community colleges in Connecticut, and that each of them would be able to take advantage of the *Achieving the Dream* model of longitudinally tracking cohorts of students to measure success.

We got buy-in from all 12 colleges in the beginning—in some cases without a complete understanding of what this was about—because they all felt they were participating in the state policy piece of it. We had dedicated meetings of the Council of Presidents focused on student success, and these were instrumental for us in creating an environment where those conversations could take place.

At first, the conversions were led by the three *Achieving the Dream* college presidents and by what they were doing on their campuses. Other colleges were participating in other initiatives in the system that were clearly not as comprehensive as *Achieving the Dream*. Their presidents brought those efforts to the table for a unified conversation focused on student success, and that drove our state policy agenda.

Bringing the data back to the presidents reinforced the notion of sharing evidence and changing the culture through data. The sharing of strategies among *Achieving the Dream* colleges and non-*Achieving the Dream* colleges became very important. Additionally, at the state policy level, involving non-*Achieving the Dream* college presidents in Connecticut’s state policy team has brought a different perspective and connected those colleges to the state policy component of the initiative.

**Data-driven decision-making is a core aspect of *Achieving the Dream*. How have you made data on student success a regular part of high-level discussions?**

**Herzog:** We started this discussion with the longitudinal cohort data being used at the three *Achieving the Dream* colleges. Those colleges could not have succeeded independently in getting the data they needed to submit for the initiative. That became a system priority, and we used

system resources and institutional research directors at other colleges to help the *Achieving the Dream* colleges get started and understand what the data work was all about. The system committed to do this for all twelve colleges once we got the first three up and running. That got the word to institutional research staff state-wide and earned us grassroots support from all twelve colleges.

Once we built capacity for data collection, we shared the last two academic years of those data with the twelve colleges. Internal competition is not necessarily a good thing, so we provided each institution with a review of its data and used system aggregate data for a comparison. We are now at the point where we see colleges with similar demographic profiles voluntarily sharing the data among themselves. A trust and respect have emerged.

We now have leaders of business and industry testifying before the General Assembly about the college readiness of high school students and the developmental needs of our students. That is evidence that we have been able to take these data and create a successful conversation, both internally and externally.

We have learned to address the challenges identified within the data. They reveal a lot of weaknesses, and we have had to figure out how to have sensitive conversations with institutions and on campuses between institutional research staff and college leadership. We also continue to face the challenge at the grassroots level of defensiveness. Some faculty in particular are better than others in recognizing what these data are. The unanimity of buy-in for the culture of evidence is still a work in progress.

**Sullivan:** I appreciate that Marc went back to that first data submission. I can clearly remember colleges saying to the system office that we did not have the capacity to help them with the initial data submission. I remember the feeling of helplessness that brought to me. We had one institutional research unit at a participating college in particular that stepped up and worked with each one of the smaller institutions to make those data submissions happen. It reinforced in our minds what a hole we

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**-Monty Sullivan**

had at the system level in terms of data capability and quality. It was a tough realization.

This caused us to rethink everything from personnel and resource decisions to what kind of data systems we needed. We had what is perhaps one of the best centralized student information structures in the country, but at the same time we had no data on the back end to show for it because we didn't build it with data needs in mind. We vowed at that point to improve.

A couple of things happened as a result. First, the colleges began to realize that not only was the system office inadequate in terms of staffing and data infrastructure, but many of the colleges were as well. At one point, we figured out that, of the twenty-three colleges in the system, maybe six or eight had full-time institutional research staff in 2005. Now in 2009, even the smallest college in the system has a full-time institutional research officer. That alone lets us know that the colleges view it as a priority. That was a huge shift.

The next critical piece was to create an appetite for the data. That means you have to be open-minded enough to realize that there will be things in these data that you don't like. We had to consider how we were going to act upon this to create a circumstance where we do like the data. We did that through a series of Student Success Snapshots that benchmarked all community colleges in the system on specific success measures. It is an idea we borrowed from our colleagues in Florida. Every single presidents' meeting from June 2008 forward has started with a two-page snapshot of the data. What you see now as a result is that the presidents have come to expect a Snapshot at every single meeting. They even now email to ask ahead of time what the Snapshot will be on. They don't want to be blindsided by the data. They want to know where they stand compared to their colleagues. The fact that this has their attention is a good thing.

**Wood:** I would add one last item: the development of a centralized data warehouse that capitalizes on our student information system. The system was not giving us the kind of data-and-reporting repository

that we needed in order to provide data for *Achieving the Dream* or to use data for research and analytics. We had an institutional research steering committee chaired by two presidents that raised awareness of the need for tools that we did not have available, as well as a recognition that the data would help individual colleges as they moved forward.

The initial tools created were a Curriculum Data Mart and a Retention Data Mart. These significantly increased the capacity to analyze data at the system and campus levels. We also had to acclimate ourselves to using milestones and intermediate measures of success and including those in our reports. Doing this, we discovered a lot of data-quality issues, some of which are still with us as we continue to move forward.

We have gone on to develop other tools, and we continue to work to provide these kinds of data at the touch of a finger for those formulating policy at the state level and practice at the college level. It is hard to believe we were where we were with data back in 2004. It is something that is part of our culture, dialogue, and practices now.

**Many states are facing incredibly challenging budget situations. How can you maintain a focus on student success in this kind of environment?**

**Sullivan:** I had the opportunity to go back to Virginia for the annual Chancellor's Retreat in August. It was interesting to be in the state at a time when we were talking about a new strategic plan with a focus on student success, and yet at the same time there was a furrowed brow on the face of every one of the twenty-three presidents. They were looking at unprecedented enrollment growth, unprecedented budget cuts, and expectations that were higher than ever.

Focusing on the needs of the state has shifted the conversation and ratcheted up the pressure on everyone. It is not about institutions. It is about the fact that the state, and its people have never needed community colleges more than right now. When you think of it in that context, you realize that for the first time in the history of our sector we are in the spotlight—not

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as a reward for our past work but as a call for refocusing and improving the results of our institutions. It is more important than ever that we produce results in the form of success for our students, not simply provide access.

The conversation has also changed in that we are no longer talking about enrollments as the measure of success. There are going to be huge increases in enrollment. We are no longer in a conversation about whether a particular measure fits our mission, or even about students who show up with multiple intents. We are beyond those. We have defined success, and right now the conversation is about our need to perform. That is very exciting. It is not easy. It is frustrating to think that we are out there doing one of the most important things that can be done during this economic downturn and doing it with less than we have ever had before. But that is our imperative.

Community colleges have to be out there fighting for more of the state appropriation, but we also have to recognize that we cannot rely upon state support as a stable funding source. What that says to us is that we have to find a better way to do what we do. The business model that we have today simply is not sustainable.

The primary expenses in our business are faculty, personnel, and buildings. We have to find another model for delivering instruction. There is simply no way for us to continue to rely on state resources because they will continue to dwindle. When you talk to members of general assemblies and legislatures, they just don't understand the inefficiencies in our system. We need to think about ways that we can get better.

We also have to continue to focus on student success. It is what you do in any business when times are tight: you focus on your core mission. We have to find a way to move students to their goals. We are seeing ingenuity at work in the private and for-profit sectors, but I think we are going to see it become more mainstream with community and technical colleges. It will change the face of higher education and, I believe, the higher education business model.

**Herzog:** Having lived through multiple declines in state budgets and appropriations, there is a real difference in what I see right now in Connecticut. *Achieving the Dream* is embedded in our philosophy at this point. Student success is now equal to access, and in the last budget crisis it was not.

In Connecticut's case, our enrollment increase and budget decrease are the same: a little over 10 percent. However, if you look at an institution's budget you can learn a lot about what its priorities are, and the current conversation has been very different. It has been an attempt to assess institutional capacity in terms of staffing and to determine how we can ensure that students have a shot at success. There has been a focus on the academic, instructional, and support services for students.

Our focus on student success has made our response more measured. We had to consider whether to cap enrollments, and we weren't able to add sections. As a result, the efficiency rates—the percentage of classroom seats filled—at our colleges right now are very high. I think at seven of twelve colleges, the efficiency rate is more than 90 percent, which is unheard of in higher education, and at one college it is 97 percent. The conversation has been to make sure that we have the resources to have academic skills labs and support services for students and not to cut back wholesale on them.

The other factor that is really important to us is the national visibility for completion and student success. I think the stars have aligned. When the President of the United States and Congress are talking about the importance of community colleges, and faculty and administrators are reading about this in the newspaper, that conversation leads to a new way of thinking about how we are accountable for what we are doing. That national visibility is going to help get us beyond the revolving door of access to the open door of success.

**“We were focused on student success before, but we didn’t quite know what to do with it. *Achieving the Dream* has helped us deal with that on a more practical level, at both the state policy and institutional levels.”**

**-Monty Sullivan**

**Was there anything about participating in *Achieving the Dream* that surprised you? What do you think will be the most important lasting effect of *Achieving the Dream* in your state?**

**Sullivan:** In our business there is a new initiative every day. What has been most surprising is the way *Achieving the Dream* has stuck. It has become a magnet for a lot of the good things going on in many states, and not just those in the initiative. I think *Achieving the Dream* has done a lot to move the community college effort forward. I think that is a testament to the quality of people and organizations involved. This is real. It is not just an opportunity to get together and bemoan the difficulties that we all face in our daily operations. I hate to say that that was a surprise, but it was.

This may seem small, but the biggest lasting effect I see is that it has fundamentally changed the conversation. We were focused on student success before, but we didn’t quite know what to do with it. *Achieving the Dream* has helped us deal with that on a more practical level, at both the state policy and institutional levels. Ultimately, it will be part and parcel with the business model and will cause us to think about and do our work differently.

**Wood:** I would say that *Achieving the Dream* has helped us understand ourselves in a very different and better way. I know the strategic plan came up earlier. That is evidence that we have a focus now for where we are heading. We understand ourselves, our colleges, and our students much better.

**Herzog:** Externally, the surprise for me was understanding the variation among states and the impact of various fundamental state policies—the kinds of degrees and certificates being offered, the types of students enrolling in those programs, what transfer policies are in place and how they impact graduation rates. We have drilled down into understanding state policy and its implications. I was surprised at the complexity and sophistication of that issue, and of how fundamentally different many states are. When you try to compare data among states, it is more important to understand

the policies that are driving those results and that behavior.

Internally, the condition and inconsistency of institutional data were very surprising. We found a lack of integrity and data quality even though we thought we had common data definitions. Now we have standards and have created a system with more consistency.

For Connecticut, the most important lasting effect is embedding student success as a strategic priority for our system. It is the umbrella goal for our system today. If *Achieving the Dream* went away, its legacy would still be here.

The faculty are very important because they are the key stakeholders in implementing cultural transformation. You have to be able to reach that level of the organization to succeed. The policies can have all of the right words, but they need to be carried out by the people in the classrooms, labs, and offices that support students.

This connection between policy and institutions is critical. I think we have started to make it, and I think that it will last because the policy work is embedded in what we are doing. But it is clearly not a complete project yet.

## Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to first issue of the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) page of *Achieving Success*. Launched in summer 2009, the DEI is an ambitious three-year effort to dramatically improve student success in developmental education. The initiative, which is led by MDC, Inc., includes 15 colleges and six states that participated in the early rounds of *Achieving the Dream*. As with *Achieving the Dream*, JFF leads the state policy component of the DEI and works with these states to incent student success in developmental education through policy change. The DEI page has two goals:

- To keep the states participating in the Developmental Education Initiative—Connecticut, Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia—current and connected on related policy developments, both within the initiative and nationally;
- To share the policy discussions generated within the DEI and the results of participating states' efforts with *Achieving the Dream* states and broader policy audiences.

The DEI page will contain updates from states, research findings, notes, publications, policy strategy, and commentary from the field. This inaugural issue introduces the DEI state policy framework.

We want to hear your ideas about content you'd like to see and suggestions for making the most of the DEI page. Please send your ideas and suggestions to Mike Collins, [mcollins@jff.org](mailto:mcollins@jff.org).



## Developmental Education Initiative

### Levers for Change:

#### The Developmental Education Initiative State Policy Framework

One strength of the state policy effort of *Achieving the Dream* was the collaboration among the participating states, Jobs for the Future, and other *Achieving the Dream* partner organizations to identify the highest-leverage policy areas that could make the biggest difference in improving student success. This work was accomplished in stages. First, we identified key policy levers, which are described in *Building Support for Student Success: A Framework for Achieving the Dream State Policy Work* (2005). Next, we developed the *Achieving the Dream Framework Self Assessment Tool* (2007), which featured a set of focused questions within each of the *Achieving the Dream* policy levers, pointing to specific policies that states might implement to improve student success. The policy framework and the self-assessment tool guide the state policy change work in *Achieving the Dream* and can provide guidance to the efforts of other states to implement policies that improve student completion.

The Developmental Education Initiative allows us to build on the foundation of the *Achieving the Dream* and to sharpen the focus of policy efforts to improve outcomes for students who place into developmental education. We revisited the *Achieving the Dream* state policy framework to identify and refine the highest-impact policy levers affecting developmental education students. After collaborating with DEI state leads, consulting the research literature, and receiving advice from national experts, JFF identified six priority state policy levers:

- Data performance and measurement;
- Developmental education innovation and redesign;
- Integration of academic and student services; and
- Finance.

These levers were vetted and affirmed at the DEI State Policy Kick Off in July 2009.

The next step has been to determine how the levers interact to improve developmental education outcomes. To this end, we introduce the *DEI State Policy Framework*, a state-level developmental education improvement strategy that incorporates the above levers into three innovation-focused action priorities:

- **A Data-Driven Improvement Process** that ensures the right conditions for innovation. This includes *data and performance measurement* activities, specifically identifying the right success measures (including intermediate measures that indicate if a student is on track for success) and protocols for systematic sharing of results as a part of state-level processes for continuous improvement. States can use these indicators to assess performance, establish a baseline, set performance goals, and monitor and report results.
- **A State-Level Innovation Investment Strategy** that helps states align and coordinate support from multiple sources to provide incentives for the development, testing, and scaling up of effective models for helping underprepared students succeed. These incentives would support *developmental education innovation and redesign*. Promising innovations would include the *integration of academic and student support services* as seen in



effective learning communities, as well as accelerated delivery models and designs such as modular, technology-based, and FastTrack approaches.

- **Policy Supports** that provide overarching support for improved outcomes for underprepared students, facilitate the implementation of effective and promising models, and encourage the spread of successful practices. This includes *aligned expectations (P-16)* and improved *assessment and placement policies*. It also includes *financial incentives*, such as weighted funding strategies, innovatively structured financial aid, and support for innovations to improve success in developmental education.

When these elements are combined with support for a state-level network of institutional innovators, assisted by

strong state-level technical assistance services, we believe states will accelerate the creation of solutions and pathways that improve outcomes for students who test into developmental education. This framework can accelerate the systematic sharing of lessons and results across institutional leadership and frontline staff in ways that drive the scaling up of effective solutions. It can also help states engage and mobilize key stakeholder groups and influential state-level spokespeople. This can help create a vibrant community of practice capable of influencing states' priorities and implementation decisions.

*For a more comprehensive description of these elements and strategies, see the Developmental Education Initiative State Policy Framework, which will be available later in winter 2010.*

*For more information, see the DEI Policy Forum online: [www.deionline.org](http://www.deionline.org)*

## FEATURED RESOURCE: NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

“Building Community: The Future of Higher Education May Depend on the Success of Community Colleges,” an article from the January 2010 issue of *State Legislatures Magazine*, provides an overview and legislative perspective on the important role of community colleges in maintaining our nation’s economic and educational competitiveness. The article’s author, Vincent Badolato, discusses factors that have propelled community colleges into the national spotlight during the current economic downturn and the potential impact of federal legislation, particularly the American Graduation Initiative, on the two-year sector. Several current and former legislators offer their views, including four from *Achieving the Dream* states: Washington Senator Derek Kilmer; Arkansas Representative Tiffany Rogers; former Indiana Senator and current Commissioner for Higher Education Theresa Lubbers; and former Connecticut State Senator and current Commissioner for Higher Education Michael Meotti.

The article offers a strong endorsement for the role that initiatives like *Achieving the Dream* have played in making

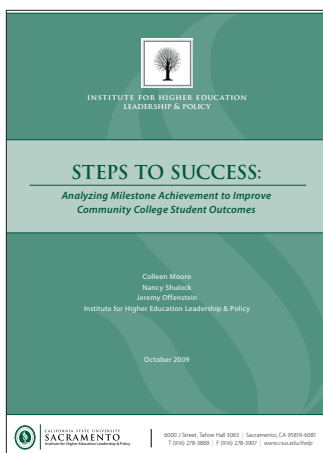
community college student success an issue of national importance. It provides background on *Achieving the Dream* and profiles the impact that the initiative has had at the state level in Connecticut and Ohio. Educational leaders in both states describe how they have leveraged their participation in *Achieving the Dream* to strengthen their state commitment to community college student success.

NCSL has posted online its full interview with Washington Senator Derek Kilmer, a former community college trustee who chairs the Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee. In the interview, Kilmer discusses the expanding role of community colleges in meeting workforce needs. He also specifically addresses several ways in which Washington’s community colleges are working to improve student success, including the state’s Student Achievement Initiative, a performance funding system for community colleges that has been implemented in part through Washington’s participation in *Achieving the Dream*.

Article: <http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=19380>

Interview: <http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=19420>





RESOURCES

**Performance Improvement and Accountability**

**New Initiative Aims to Improve Community College Accountability Systems**

[www.gatesfoundation.org/press-releases/Pages/community-colleges-improving-graduation-rates-091006.aspx](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/press-releases/Pages/community-colleges-improving-graduation-rates-091006.aspx)

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation for Education recently announced a new initiative to develop an accountability system that facilitates student success and timely degree completion at our nation’s community colleges. The two-year initiative will be co-led by the American Association of Community Colleges, the College Board, and the Association of Community College Trustees. Eight colleges have been designated as pilot sites for the new system to evaluate institutional effectiveness, including five with ties to *Achieving the Dream*. This initial pilot round will be expanded to as many as 20 additional colleges after two years. While additional information on the initiative is forthcoming, a press release can be found on the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s website.

**CCRC Examines Performance Measures for Community Colleges**

[ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=728](http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=728)

As part of a new accountability initiative from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education, the Community College Research Center (an *Achieving the Dream* partner organization) was asked to conduct a study of current performance measures for community colleges. The study, *Performance Accountability Systems for Community Colleges: Lessons for the Voluntary Framework of Accountability for Community Colleges*, includes a survey of state- and institution-level policy makers in 10 states and a literature review. It offers list of recommendations for how to better structure performance measurement systems, how to improve the quality of measurement, how to facilitate data collection among commu-

nity colleges, and how to use data from performance measures more effectively. The study also points out that effective performance measures for community colleges are by and large not compatible with current requirements of federal reporting and accreditation.

**NGA Brief Advocates for Broader Accountability Measures**

[www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.9123e83a1f6786440ddcbeeb501010a0?vgnextoid=77006be804ec4210VgnVCM1000005e00100aRCRD](http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.9123e83a1f6786440ddcbeeb501010a0?vgnextoid=77006be804ec4210VgnVCM1000005e00100aRCRD)

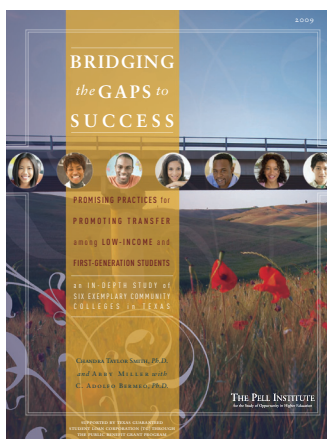
*Measuring Student Achievement at Postsecondary Institutions*, an issue brief from the National Governors Association, takes a critical look at the ways states measure student success at institutions of higher education. It contends that accountability measures for institutions of higher education exclude many students, particularly those who have traditionally been underrepresented, and that the measures penalize institutions like community colleges that focus on serving these students. According to the brief, current measures capture too few milestones to tell us much about student progress, and they advocate for the use of four distinct types of milestones:

- Successful completion of remedial and core courses;
- Advancement from remedial to credit-bearing courses;
- Transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution; and
- Credential attainment.

**Study Proposes Framework for Community College Student Progression**

[www.csus.edu/libhelp](http://www.csus.edu/libhelp)

*Steps to Success: Analyzing Milestone Achievement to Improve Community College Student Outcomes*, a study by the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, highlights the lack of reporting on intermediate outcomes as a flaw in current accountability for community colleges. The authors propose a framework of milestones and indicators, or patterns of milestones, that are associated with a greater likelihood of completion.



They also use the framework to analyze student progression in California’s 110 community colleges, concluding that too few students reach each milestone, and recommend changes to data systems and policy that could help improve these rates.

## Financial Aid

### Misinformation on Financial Aid Common Among Students

[www.calpirg.org/news-releases/affordable-higher-education/affordable-higher-education/working-too-hard-to-make-the-grade](http://www.calpirg.org/news-releases/affordable-higher-education/affordable-higher-education/working-too-hard-to-make-the-grade)

*Working Too Hard to Make the Grade*, a California Public Interest Research Group report, details how student success at community colleges is hindered by a lack of financial aid awareness and the resulting need to work significant hours. The report concludes that many students are misinformed about their eligibility for financial aid. The authors asked more than 2,500 community students whether each of the following true statements was accurate:

- I have to go to school full-time to be eligible for financial aid.
- Taking more classes increases your financial aid.
- Financial aid can be used to pay for living expenses.

About half of the students got each question wrong, and more students answered all three questions incorrectly than correctly. The authors also found that students worked 23 hours per week on average. Fewer than 25 percent of students felt they were balancing their work and studies well.

### The Need to Link Financial Aid Policies to Cost of Attendance

[www.demos.org/publication.cfm?currentpublicationID=067E668C%2D3FF4%2D6C82%2D52B97ADF17DE3CF5](http://www.demos.org/publication.cfm?currentpublicationID=067E668C%2D3FF4%2D6C82%2D52B97ADF17DE3CF5)

*Work Less, Study More & Succeed*, a report from the think tank Demos, contends that financial aid policies must be reformed if we expect to increase post-secondary success rates among low- and middle-income students. The authors cite a growing gap between income and the cost of higher education as a fundamental

barrier to student success. They argue that, even though community colleges charge relatively low tuition, the other expenses associated with college attendance still make the total out-of-pocket cost prohibitively high. The paper concludes with a recommendation to focus financial aid policies on the total cost of college attendance rather than the cost of tuition.

## Transfer and Articulation

### Pell Report Examines Best Practices in Student Transfer

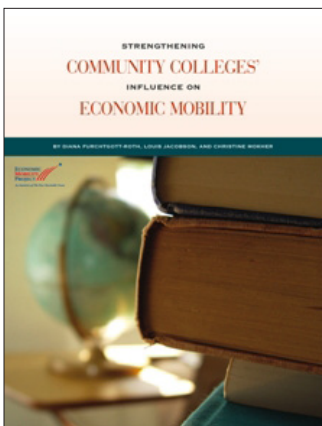
[www.pellinstitute.org/pdf/COE\\_Pell\\_Report\\_layout\\_3.pdf](http://www.pellinstitute.org/pdf/COE_Pell_Report_layout_3.pdf)

*Bridging the Gaps to Success: Promising Practices for Promoting Transfer Among Low-Income and First-Generation Students*, from the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, examines best practices in facilitating student transfer at six Texas community colleges. The authors compare strategies across these colleges to identify three characteristics that are essential to promoting student transfer to four-year institutions: structured academic pathways; a student-centered culture; and culturally sensitive leadership.

### Two Massachusetts Colleges Highlighted for Transfer Efforts

[www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/11/13/holyoke](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/11/13/holyoke)

“Path to Transfer,” in the November 13 *Inside Higher Ed*, focuses on the work of Mount Holyoke College and Holyoke Community College in Massachusetts to provides incentives for students to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. With support from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, the two schools have worked together to develop the Community College Transfer Initiative. Mount Holyoke, a private institution with an elite national reputation, accepted 83 transfer students from Holyoke Community College in 2009, and the number of transfer applications between the schools increased nearly 50 percent. As part of the program, Mount Holyoke has committed to accept ten additional low- and middle-income students per year over the next four years.



## Student Success

### Highlighting the Importance of Student Engagement

[www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org)

The University of Texas at Austin’s Community College Leadership Program (an *Achieving the Dream* partner organization) released its ninth annual *Community College Survey of Student Engagement* in November. This year’s survey, completed by more than 400,000 students, focuses on the impact of relationships among students, faculty, and administrators on student engagement and persistence. The annual CCSSE report stresses the importance of strategies that reach out to students beyond the classroom. This year’s survey includes a special focus on the use of technology to foster student engagement. The results indicate that, while technology-based solutions that are academically focused are correlated with improved engagement, the use of technology solutions in other high-touch areas such as student orientation has a negative effect. The survey also highlights the challenges that part-time students and faculty face in fostering these interconnections.

### Report Finds Choice of Subject Strongly Influences Economic Mobility

[www.economicmobility.org/reports\\_and\\_research/other/other?id=0010](http://www.economicmobility.org/reports_and_research/other/other?id=0010)

*Strengthening Community Colleges’ Influence on Economic Mobility*, a brief by the Pew Charitable Trusts’ Economic Mobility Project, analyzes data on 84,000 Florida high school graduates in order to determine how community colleges contributed to these students’ economic mobility. While attendance was associated with increased economic mobility across the board, the most remarkable finding was how great a role the choice of subject area played. A low-performing high school student in a high-demand field saw a greater average return than a high-performing high school student who chose a lower-demand field. The study also highlighted the valuable role of Florida’s community colleges in helping students transfer to four-year institutions.

## Achieving the Dream Partner Resources

### MDRC Publishes Case Study of *Achieving the Dream* Institution

[www.mdrc.org/publications/526/overview.html](http://www.mdrc.org/publications/526/overview.html)

MDRC, an *Achieving the Dream* partner organization, has released its first case study of an *Achieving the Dream* institution. *Building Student Success from the Ground Up* profiles North Carolina’s Guilford Technical Community College, which has participated in the initiative since its inception in 2004. The study details GTCC’s effort to develop priorities for its *Achieving the Dream* work, improve institutional research capacity and data systems, and use professional development to build buy-in and commitment to these priorities. Using data from interviews and trend data on student progression and outcomes, the authors conclude that there is evidence of increased persistence and course completion among students participating in several targeted interventions. The most promising evidence comes from Guilford’s student success courses: students enrolled demonstrated increased persistence and graduation rates, trends that were even more pronounced among African-American males, a key target population of the initiative.